

Communication/Bio-Terrorism Scenarios

Southwest Washington Health District

All Staff Training Day ... April 17, 2002

SCENARIO # 1

(1) Last weekend seven people (one adult and six teenagers) were admitted into local Vancouver hospitals, each with confirmed Non-Hemorrhagic Dengue Fever. Initial information indicates that these seven were part of a group of 24 DECA representatives (a national marketing and business organization for high school students) who returned last week from Thailand. This trip was a week-long foreign business study experience. A total of five adults and 19 teenagers took part in this trip.

Close family relatives are very worried about getting the disease from those who traveled. The families have been calling school officials and are leaving messages at the local Health District. The school district has issued an incorrect statement that says vaccines are available from the health district. The media interviewed several of the family members for the Sunday evening news.

Some basic facts:

- *Dengue is not directly transmitted from person to person.*
- *Quarantine is not required. No specific treatment is required for patients.*
- *Dengue patients are infected by a unique species of mosquito (aegypti) found throughout Asia.*
- *As with Dengue, West Nile Virus (WNV) is transmitted by a specific mosquito (culex) and is recognized as a cause of severe human meningoencephalitis (inflammation of the spinal cord and brain) in elderly patients. WNV is now present in 12 eastern US states.*
- *No vaccine currently exists for either disease.*
- *One way to reduce your risk of diseases spread by mosquitoes is to eliminate mosquito habitat on your property and take steps to avoid bites.*

Instructions: Develop key messages for the media and the public. Consider the target audience as you work on these messages. You may want to anticipate the tough questions that reporters will ask, and work your messages into the answers.

Decide which communication tools to use to deliver the key messages. Examples: news releases, fact sheets, and public outreach (e.g. contact individuals and/or organizations directly; hold meetings). Be prepared to explain why you chose the tools you would use.

Choose a spokesperson from your work group, and prepare that person for media interviews.

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SCENARIO # 2

(2) A picnic was recently held at a local river in Skamania County, where four area churches celebrated a multi-denomination fellowship service. About 230 people attended. They ran out of Kool-Aid, so decided to mix another large batch with the cold, clear water from the creek. Now eighteen folks have Giardia, confirmed from stool samples. You learn from initial interviews that at least 45 were visitors who do not attend these churches.

The media is aware of the situation and has interviewed several people who were there. On the evening news, one man said, "I didn't get sick, because I had this stuff several years ago so now I'm immune."

Some basic facts:

- *Giardia is a small protozoan cyst, commonly caused by animal feces in the water.*
- *Boiling water is the best treatment.*
- *Household bleach does not reliably treat Giardia contaminated water.*
- *Person to person transmission does occur, with children most at risk.*
- *Immunity does not occur.*
- *Metronidazole is the treatment drug of choice, with other pediatric suspensions for young children.*

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(3) The local law enforcement has busted another meth lab in rural Clark County. The Health District also responded to assess the site. Preliminary findings exposed what appears to be a septic tank, where the lab operators had discarded many chemicals over a long period of time. Further exploration revealed that the septic tank was actually bottomless, and all dumped chemicals had seeped into the surrounding shallow water table. A childcare facility without a permit was operating nearby. It used a private well for its sole source of water. The facility cared for as many as 11 infants and young children per day. Parents are aware of the potentially contaminated well and are upset about the exposure to their children. They want the Health District to protect their health and fix it. Reporters are calling the Health District and asking for interviews.

Some basic facts:

- *There is no information available about the water quality because no tests have ever been done on the childcare well.*
- *No information is available about the nature or quantity of the chemicals being discarded into the seepage pit.*
- *Boiling the well water or using household bleach may not be effective.*
- *Some children are reported to be sick an unusual amount of time, without any pediatric confirmation.*
- *Most parents do not want their name involved and wish to remain anonymous.*

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SCENARIO # 4

(4) A TV documentary aired several months ago about acid rain in Europe. Shortly thereafter, a local group of environmental extremists decided to stage a demonstration to draw attention to the perceived threat to air quality. The group burned down a local government agency parking garage. Eight diesel-fuel vehicles were destroyed in the fire. This terrorist act occurred 1/2 mile upwind from a retirement community with 121 residents. Nineteen residents with respiratory complaints were taken to hospital emergency rooms. Two more suffered mild heart attacks due to the commotion. The extremists claiming responsibility issued a statement against fossil fuel use. TV and radio reporters are demanding comments from the Health District about the effect of the smoke on the residents of the retirement community. They also want your agency's opinion on terrorist acts in the northwest.

Some basic facts:

- *The documentary was about stack emissions from outdated coal-fired steel mills that are still using 1950's technology.*
- *No additional information is available about the extreme environmentalist group.*
- *You notice that, before the interview starts, the reporter first quickly finishes smoking a cigarette then approaches to start asking questions about air quality.*
- *Smoke from this arson resulted in respiratory complaints and some hospitalizations. There has never been a reported death due to acid rain.*
- *There are approximately 17 million people who have Asthma with 4,657 deaths from Asthma in the US in 1999 (CDC). Second-hand Environmental Tobacco Smoke causes about 3,000 lung cancer deaths annually among adult nonsmokers (National Institute of Health).*

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SCENARIO # 5

(5) The SWWHD office has just received a call from the 911-dispatcher. Twenty minutes ago, a southbound vehicle drove through Vancouver on I-5, crossed the bridge and continued south through Portland. Witnesses reported seeing someone in the vehicle throwing plastic bags out a side window. The bags opened when they hit the pavement and spread a white powdery substance. This occurred over an area of about four miles. Heavy traffic spread the powder across the freeway. State Patrol has decided to close I-5 -- traffic is a mess. Dozens of people are calling 911, worried about anthrax. Oregon agencies are also fully responding. Businesses near the highway are considering evacuating. Broadcast news is live on the scene interviewing drivers, passengers, and witnesses. People with respiratory complaints are arriving at local hospitals. The media is there as well.

Some basic facts:

- *There is no information available about the substance. Authorities have collected a sample and it is on the way to the lab for analysis.*
- *You notice when you arrive that the wind is blowing strong towards the Gorge to the east. There has also been a steady light rain throughout the entire time.*
- *The department of Transportation estimates that 2700 vehicles may have driven through this powder. You have no idea how many people have been exposed.*
- *Human anthrax has three major clinical forms: cutaneous, inhalation, and gastrointestinal. A person can be exposed without having the disease.*
- *Clothing and vehicles can be decontaminated using soap and water, and household bleach (one part household bleach to nine parts water) according to the CDC.*
- *Some folks are asking doctors to prescribe Ciprofloxacin without reason. The side effects of Cipro may include nausea, mild diarrhea, stomach pain, headache and dizziness. Cipro also can cause sun sensitivity, which increases the chances of sunburn. More serious side effects include central nervous system side effects such as confusion, tremors, hallucinations, depression, and increased risk of seizures. High blood pressure and blurred vision are also possible. Allergic reactions could cause difficulty breathing; closing of the throat; swelling of the lips, tongue, or face; hives or severe diarrhea. (CDC)*

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